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SUBJECT: GOE TO LAUNCH "PLAN ECUADOR"; BACKS OFF
BI-NATIONAL PLAN

REF: QUITO 00988

Classified By: PolOff Jarahn Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Espinosa, Defense Minister Escudero, and Minister Coordinator Bustamante on March 20 announced vague plans to develop a "Plan Ecuador" to promote peace, attack poverty, and manage negative impacts on Ecuador of Colombia's internal conflict, and solicited international community support for development and security investments in Ecuador's northern region bordering Colombia. The GOE plans to officially launch the Plan on April 13, two days before the referendum on the constituent assembly, and has invited high-level participation by foreign governments, civil society leaders, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and other notables. A genuine effort to bring more focus and coordination to Northern Border development could have merit, but the politics behind this initiative are suspect and are likely to complicate still further GOE-GOC relations. End Summary.

GOE Announces "Plan Ecuador"

12. (SBU) Minister of Foreign Affairs Maria Fernanda Espinosa together with Minister of Defense Lorena Escudero and Minister of Coordination of Internal and External Security Fernando Bustamante announced on March 20 that the GOE was developing a plan to guide security and development investment in the northern border region of Ecuador. Bustamante explained to international donors and foreign diplomats that "Plan Ecuador" would seek to combat poverty, strengthen human rights, promote peace, and enhance social and economic development of Ecuadorian border communities negatively impacted by Colombia's internal conflict. Escudero echoed Bustamante's comments and repeated previous calls for a greater military role in social-development work in the border region. Espinosa said that the plan would be launched by President Correa on April 13 in Quito, and that the GOE was looking for high-level foreign government and civil society participation. She also stressed the importance of giving direction to a wide variety of development efforts already underway in the region.

Few Questions Signal Confusion

13. (SBU) Following the briefing, the European Commission representative asked Espinosa if the GOE would conclude the Ecuador-Colombia binational plan developed with UNDP assistance (Reftel). Undersecretary for National Sovereignty and Border Development Ambassador Diego Stacey responded that

since the proposed agreement with Colombia would not be signed, Ecuador needed its own plan to deal with the negative effects of Colombia's internal conflict. Some aspects of the binational plan might be incorporated into Plan Ecuador, he said. The Peruvian Ambassador praised the GOE for its initiative and highlighted the positive aspects of the Peru-Ecuador Binational Plan. Espinosa thanked the Peruvian Ambassador for his comments, clarifying that Plan Ecuador is not a binational plan and that it is intended to restore "order" to existing assistance and ensure that assistance answers Ecuador's perceived needs. She then thanked donors for past support for border development efforts managed by UDENOR and IOM.

MFA Officials Skeptical; Questions Motives

¶4. (C) Director General for Border Relations with Colombia Ambassador Cluadio Cevallos, who was also present at the March 20 meeting, told PolOff on March 16 that he had few details about the proposed Plan Ecuador. He pointed out that this is not the first time discussion of such a plan had surfaced, and wondered if the government would actually follow through. Cevallos considered the bi-national plan, which his office helped design with UN technical assistance, and Plan Ecuador to be two separate issues with room for co-existence. He believed the latter plan to have primarily domestic political motivation, meant to appeal to Correa's nationalist constituency.

¶5. (C) Cevallos said that his office, through Stacey, had taken part in Plan Ecuador discussions with representatives from the Ministry of Defense, the Northern Border Development Unit (UDENOR), and the Ministry of Government. Cevallos showed PolOff a draft outline used to guide discussions, and

lamented the inclusion of overly political language targeted at Colombia, the U.S., and Plan Colombia. "You don't insult someone and then turn around and ask them for a handout," Cevallos lamented. He reported that Stacey had been successful in convincing the new government to remove some "unhelpful" language.

Stalled Relations Unhelpful

¶6. (C) Cevallos said that the binational plan with Colombia was stalled by the disagreement over Colombia's aerial coca fumigation within 10 kilometers of the Ecuadorian border. He explained that discussions to establish the terms of the tripartite commission to study the impact of aerial dissemination of glyphosate in Ecuador had been stalled by the GOC's insistence on proof that glyphosate had actually fallen in Ecuador. He suggested the only way for the Correa government to get past the fumigation issue would be for the GOC to agree to a permanent cessation of aerial fumigations on the border. Cevallos said that the GOE "knows the U.S. is pressuring to fumigate every inch of suspected territory" and warned that Correa would move to draw the USG into the dispute.

¶7. (C) Cevallos said that for the moment Ecuador had only presented a report on the effects of glyphosate at the HRC in Geneva, but warned that without a permanent GOC cessation the issue would be used to discredit the USG and Colombia. PolOff defended Colombia's fumigation efforts and raised the negative environmental and health impacts of cocaine processing labs.

¶8. (C) Comment: The GOE's move to repackage current assistance as a Plan Ecuador could have some merit in terms of improving coordination of disparate programs, but its political coloration is unfortunate. It demonstrates GOE resolve to hold its broader relationship with Colombia hostage to resolution of the fumigation issue, for domestic political benefit. The rushed GOE launch scheduled for April 13, when details of the plan remain to be fleshed out, seems to further reflect this domestic political agenda, coming just two days before the April 15 referendum on his showcase national constituent assembly referendum. A significant

turnout of regional leaders and peace laureates would boost the Correa government's domestic legitimacy in the wake of dubious moves against its opposition in Congress. Despite these misgivings, we are hopeful that our existing programs to promote security and development in the border regions will not be affected by the GOE's campaign.

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